

HOUSING SPEAK OUT

MARCH 30, 1996 TESTIMONY

"The Congress of the United States has allocated no new Section 8's, in spite of the thousands of people on the waiting list... We have got to see what we can do to provide a job, a home and a future for everyone...The Housing & Jobs Initiative has been introduced in both the Assembly and Senate. It has support from both parties. ...The state must reverse the trend of the federal government...It is the role of the state government to use our taxes to help those in need of affordable housing..."

Arnold Cohen, Affordable Housing Network of NJ

"According to the rich people, if you're poor, you don't deserve a place to live."

C. Stephan Jones, Metropolitan Ecumenical Ministry

"I've lived at Garden Spires for 23 years. As you know it was a very troubled project...In February, the local HUD Office did a Housing Quality Standards inspection and found 100 pages of violations. They gave the owners 30 days to turn the project around or they would withdraw the Section 8's in the building. Tenants and the management company are working together. We now have 24 hour security. We have intercoms and an ID card system. We have a Tenant Association, and floor captains. We have 24 hour elevator monitors, tenants who are being paid by management to run the elevators. We have a Security Committee, a Screening Committee and lighting around the perimeter of the building. We have made a 360 degree turn around at Garden Spires."

Nellie Daniels, President, Garden Spires Tenant Association

"In a given week approximately 1000 evictions take place in Essex County—50,000 evictions a year. There are not enough judges...The cause of most evictions is lack of income. Most of the people are on very low wages or public assistance benefits. Public assistance has not risen in 10 to 15 years. This would be acceptable, if there was affordable housing, but we don't have that either. The lack of interest among our public officials is making life intolerable...We have got to make our local state and federal officials do what they are supposed to do. In the past, there have been financial incentives to allow conditions to worsen, and tenants then get rent increases."

Cesar Torres, Director of the Housing Unit, Essex Newark Legal Services

"My question is why is HUD giving rent vouchers to tenants to go to buildings which are dilapidated or buildings which are condemned?"

Jamie Jones, East Orange Tenants Association

"People all across the state of New Jersey are organizing for affordable housing. If they continue to make their needs known to their legislators, we will finally have clean, safe, decent neighborhoods."

**Hall Hamilton, Community Development Officer,
Corinthian Housing Development Corp.**

"I lived for 4 months this winter without heat and hot water, and paying \$450 a month. Now I have respiratory problems as a result, and am unable to work."

Charlie Williams, Douglass Harrison Apartment

"We are working on an ordinance which would allow tenants in buildings with 50 or 75 units to be required to have security in their buildings. Currently the ordinance requires buildings with 100 or more apartments to have security. We are also working on an ordinance which would say that landlords cannot get an automatic rent increase when they have code violations in their building. We need your help to get the City Council to pass this legislation."

Gerakline Howard, President, 25 Van Velsor Tenants Association

"In my building, there is a camera in the lobby for security, but it has no film, so there is no security in the building. Anyone can come in and go out. The manager and the owner do not want to know. Inspections that are done at the building are bogus. The inspector never comes inside."

Mikul Abdullah, 2 Keer Avenue

"I represent people who live in Apostles House Family Shelter. Affordability is a big issue. When they say this will be affordable housing, we should ask, affordable to who? A lot of people can't afford to pay the rents. The average rent is \$650. Even if you are working at a minimum wage job you have to decide whether to pay rent or buy food. Under the Governor's Work First proposal, where are they going to get these jobs? In December of 1996, there was 8% unemployment rate in Essex County, and only 3% in Morris County. If you are making \$5.05 an hour, could you afford \$650 rent? The welfare reform proposal addresses childcare subsidy and transportation, but housing is not addressed in this workshop. Creating affordable housing is not an easy task. But we need affordable housing. It is a disgrace that in the United States we have the number of homeless people that we have."

Sandy Accomando, Apostles House Shelter

"We put our elected officials in—lets take them out. We want buildings where there is no conflict of interest between the managers and the people they hire, no relatives hired."

**Francis Houston, President
Georgia King Village Tenants Association**

"I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired, to quote Fannie Lou Hamer... The question is what are we going to do about these housing problems. The time for talking is over; the time for action is now. The rescinding of the Brooke Amendment which allows rents in public housing to rise, is just one of a number of changes in federal housing programs, which all add up to a 'War Against The Poor.' When we organize and work together we do have an effect...We just had an article published in HUD's own newsletter, and it was called 'True Partners.' Residents must be true partners in all efforts to preserve HUD-assisted buildings."

Frank Hutchins, HUD Tenants' Coalition

"It is good to see so many longtime fighters here. I am encouraged by the number of people here. People in Washington who are in power do not like HUD. They don't want government involved in housing and they are cutting the programs. They are cutting \$7.2 billion in money that had already been promised to HUD. They are cutting 40% of the homeless assistance funds. They are cutting modernization funds for repairs in vacant apartments, \$38 million in rental assistance funds, \$39 million from public housing capital improvement budget. They have eliminated the Housing Authority drug-elimination program. They are considering the Personal Responsibility act which says you have only 5 years of welfare in a lifetime—regardless of circumstances. States have to reduce the number of public assistance cases they handle by 50% in 2 years. Section 8 voucher funds will be cut. These are mean-spirited steps. But we can turn it around. We have got to get out, register, and vote."

Congressman Donald Payne

"I feel like I had 4 years of education here today."

**Panel member Gwen Orlowski,
lawyer Seton Hall Law School Center for Social Justice**

"We all have a common interest. We need affordable, available housing, with security, and safe living conditions."

**Panel member Isabel Roche,
Junior League of Montclair and Newark**

HOUSING ACTION AGENDA

MARCH 1996

A. Some of the greatest concerns expressed at the Housing Speak Out involve the proposals and changes taking place at the federal level regarding low income housing programs.

ACTION: Write or contact our federal legislators to oppose:

- a) passage of the Brooke Amendment, which would allow for rent increases in public housing.
- b) the weakening regulations which give residents in government-assisted housing rights to "safe, decent, and sanitary" housing.
- c) the introduction of vouchers to replace existing project-based Section 8 programs.
- d) the ending of the low income tax credit, the weakening of Community Reinvestment Act, reducing H.O.M.E. funds—the three main programs which provide affordable housing.

B. Action at the state level:

ACTION: Write the Governor and key legislative leaders to support the "Jobs From Housing & Economic Development Bond Act (A-1442/1443 & S 202-203). Endorse the Bond Act yourself - forms enclosed. The Bond Act would create jobs and stimulate the State's economy. It is a necessary step to address the problems of poor and working people in New Jersey.

C. At the local level:

- 1) Support proposals which tighten loopholes in the rent control law, such as the proposal to require security in buildings of 75 units or more.
- 2) Maintain and increase the budget for code enforcement, and take steps to make the process of code inspection fair, honest, accessible and effective.

HOUSING ACTION AGENDA COUPON

**I or my organization will show support for the
HOUSING ACTION AGENDA by:**

- ☐ 1) Passing resolutions or advocating for the passage of resolutions in support of the Housing Action Agenda.
- ☐ 2) Writing letters to Federal, State, and City elected officials.
- ☐ 3) Informing my members or constituents regarding the housing crisis and action that can be taken.

Contact person: _____ Phone/fax: _____

Please let us know what action you will be taking by checking the above and mailing or faxing the coupon to: HUD Tenants Coalition, 95 Fleming Avenue, Newark, NJ 07105, fax (201) 589-4668. If you wish to have one of our members speak to your group regarding the Housing Action Agenda, call us at (201) 589-3353. Please send us copies of letters you write to elected officials.